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# Old and New Testament Student

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THE first number of the STUDENT was published April 1, 1882. Its history has not been an altogether uninteresting one. The original name, *Hebrew Student*, was found to be too technical, and for it was substituted *The Old Testament Student*. When this change was made, the publication of *Hebraica* was begun, and from that time all linguistic and exclusively critical matter was omitted from the STUDENT. At no time has the wisdom of this change been questioned. It commended itself to all who were interested in Old Testament work. Whether the change which is inaugurated with the present number shall also prove to be a wise one, time only will tell. In its favor are the following considerations:

(1) The Old Testament and the New are, after all, one; one in spirit, one in matter, one in respect to the method by which they must be studied. If this is true, why should they be separated?

(2) It has been found practically impossible to treat Old Testament subjects without continual reference to the New Testament. In the volume just completed the latter has indeed been included. Why should not the journal be in name what it is in fact?

(3) There is a pressing demand for a journal which shall do for the New Testament what the STUDENT has for seven years endeavored to do for the Old Testament. The cry of our times is for the application of scientific methods in the study of the Bible. It is not sufficient that such methods are employed by the consecrated scholarship of the day. The same methods must be introduced into popular Bible study.

We say, *must be introduced*; for if the methods of the last century continue to hold exclusive sway, the time will come when intelligent men of all classes will say, 'If this is your Bible we will have none of it.'

The STUDENT, therefore, having completed the first seven years of its existence, now enters upon a second seven years. In its new dress, and with its enlarged scope, it will aim to perform a service in the interests of true biblical study which shall merit the good wishes of all old, and, we trust, many new friends.

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NOT infrequently there have been published in the STUDENT articles to the sentiment of which many, indeed a majority of its readers, have made strong objection. In some cases the Editor has been most severely censured by individuals and by the press. The policy of the journal was laid down clearly and distinctly in its first number. The difficulties of the position were fully anticipated. The policy there indicated has been rigidly followed. The editorial outline of that policy (published April, 1882) was as follows:

In its attitude towards "new theories," this Journal will be conservative. Judicious discussion of questions of criticism will be encouraged, but in no case will the editor be responsible for views expressed by contributors.

It is desirable, for many reasons, to emphasize this statement, made in the Prospectus. Once for all the editor desires to say that the periodical will be conducted in the interest of no "theory," old or new. It is a fact which must be recognized, that at the present time, much doubt and uncertainty assail those beliefs which all have been accustomed to hold. Attacks of the most unscrupulous character have been made against the authenticity of certain portions of the Old Testament. New methods of study have been introduced. It is not too much to say that never before was the Old Testament studied as it is now being studied, alike by friend and foe. What will be the outcome? That our old ideas will be modified to a greater or less extent, is probable. But that they are entirely to be given up, and others of the most opposite character substituted for them, the safest authorities deny. In view of these facts, the question arises, and it is a serious one, in what manner is a conservative journal to be conducted? Shall all communications which are not of the

most conservative stamp be rejected? It may be the opinion of some that, since the great majority of readers will be incapable of deciding for themselves as to the truth or falsity of the views presented, and since the reading of such views must necessarily more or less unsettle the opinion of all who read them, it is not wise or prudent to publish them. There is undoubtedly a truth here, yet is it altogether true? The "new views" in one way or another will reach the pastors. There is scarcely a well-read minister who has not examined Prof. Wm. Robertson Smith's "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church." They will read, almost without exception, his book on Prophecy. These questions will certainly be studied. It is merely a matter of time and place. And what better place is there for this study and examination, than the recitation-room of our theological Seminaries, or the conservative religious paper, where the falsity as well as the truth will be noticed, where rash speculation will be dealt with as such, where "love for truth and evangelical Christianity" is uppermost "in hearts full of the love of Christ." Why should not these "theories" be met face to face and grappled with?

These and other questions have already come up for decision. That great care and prudence are necessary in the management of this work, is fully appreciated. Will our readers but remember, 1) that whatever appears in our columns is permitted a place there because it is believed that it will subserve the interests of truth; 2) that it is the privilege of the reader, as it will also be of the editor, to criticize or refuse assent to any unguarded or unfounded statements of a radical tendency, which a contributor may have seen fit to employ.

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THE Semitic "genius for religion" is frequently spoken of in modern criticism. The use of this phrase is based on certain definite presuppositions, and carries with it certain inevitable conclusions. It rests on the assumption that the religion of Israel is a natural growth, a product of human thought and activity, in the same sense as the religions of heathenism. All consideration of a direct revelation, or of the unfolding of a divine purpose of redemption, must therefore be excluded. Any supernatural element is to be dismissed at once as mythological or legendary. The religion of Israel is only a "cultus,"—something cultivated by human art, like peas or cabbages, and, like these, owing its prolific growth entirely to the extraordinary richness of the soil and

to the planter's skill. Instead of Jehovah being the author of the religion, the religion is the author of Jehovah, who has been developed from an obscure family or tribal god into an overshadowing national deity to whom Israel belonged, and by whom they imagined themselves to be led and miraculously delivered in the exigencies of their national life. The fact that Israel far outstripped every other people in the struggle to attain ultimate religious truth was simply owing to the culmination in them of the Semitic "genius for religion." Like every other religion it must therefore be studied and interpreted historically, i. e., the supernatural must be eliminated root and branch, and the residuum reconstructed according to an *a priori* hypothesis.

We freely admit that a legitimate, historical study of the Old Testament has cleared up many of its obscurities, and wonderfully supplemented its brief and imperfect narratives; but we deny that a satisfactory Old Testament theology can be constructed on such a foundation alone without doing violence to the record at every step. The demand that the history of religion in Israel be studied "without prejudice," i. e., in the same manner as we study the development of laws, poetry, literature, and similar intellectual possessions elsewhere, cannot be granted, for the following reasons:

1. The religion of Israel presents claims that at the very outset differentiate it from all products of natural development. To ignore these claims is not an evidence of judicial impartiality, but of invincible prejudice. They are accounted preposterous, because the supernatural has already been assumed to be impossible.

2. Each prominent nation of antiquity realized in large measure its distinctive aim or goal—temporal empire by the Assyrians, commercial supremacy by the Phœnicians, philosophy and art by the Greeks, and jurisprudence by the Romans. Their own energy drove them along the path which their national instinct marked out. The history of Israel, looked at superficially, discloses a still more lofty aim, the attainment of which, despite many confusions and perversions, concentrated the energies of the people for a thousand years. But here we must sharply distinguish the operation of a new factor. Israel, in the attainment of the highest religious ideals, was not driven by a mere natural impulse, but was

set apart for an altogether unique destiny. Throughout its national life it was steadily held to the accomplishment of this purpose by a Power outside of and above itself, and from which it struggled continually to escape into the realm of the natural and sensuous. Israel did not of its own accord address itself to the discovery of the true religion any more than other nations that early swerved into polytheism. The Old Testament everywhere represents the solution of this problem as placed before Israel by the Spirit of God through the prophets, who insisted that the nation could never realize its peculiar glory except by holding fast to its divine inheritance. The record of Israel's career among the nations is, then, not merely inspired history, but the history of inspiration; not merely the evolution of national genius, but the involution of divine thought. Nor can it be understood if studied from a lower point of view.

Historical study of the Old Testament is eminently proper and profitable if it includes a recognition of the unique element in Israel's religion, but it is misleading and abortive if it excludes this element. An adequate Old Testament theology must therefore repose on a conviction that the history of Israel is the history of a divine revelation, and not merely the history of a people who had a genius for religion. No one denies that the Semites were endowed with acute religious sensibility. But in the case of Israel the infinite Spirit of God stooped to this natural sensibility and lifted it into communion with divine thoughts and purposes.

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THE Gospel of John is the greatest book ever written. Its subject is a unique person. Its delineation of that person is a unique delineation. Jesus Christ, like every human being, lived a dual life—outward, related to humanity in general—inward, spiritual, related to heavenly things, concerned with an inner circle of intimate friends. This latter sphere is the chief theme of the fourth Gospel. What sets it apart and above the other books is that it clearly and purposely reveals, not what Jesus did, but what he was, his person, claims, and character. What they accomplish indirectly this book does directly. It paints its portrait from life. They collect the materials and let their subject in his real self shine through

or be reflected in their records of his objective activity. It is the same portrait. There is no discordance. The keenest of critical inquiries have failed to discover any difference, in the essential elements, between the representation of Jesus according to the three first Gospels and that of the fourth. Still, if in so lofty a range of literature there are loftier heights, the Gospel of John rises far above the others in the majesty and mystery of its disclosures of the person of Christ.

There can be no reasonable doubt that this fourth Gospel is a trustworthy document. The sharp controversy of the last fifty years has left us in the position that here is a record which comes from the personal recollections of the man whose name it bears. What, then, may be said for its contents? The recollections of a disciple, they are the recollections of *the* disciple, of one who was peculiarly near the heart and life of Jesus. He was one who seems to have been more than ordinarily gifted mentally and spiritually and his gifts of mind and soul more than ordinarily developed. He was fitted,—if any one was fitted, he above others,—to receive the fullest and finest impression of his Master's character. On purely critical grounds alone there is reason for maintaining that the representation of Jesus Christ given in the Gospel of John is the most trustworthy of all.

What is the reflection with which these marvelous recollections are concluded? It is this—*there are also many other things which Jesus did*. Like all other attempts to picture the person and work of Jesus, this book confesses itself to be totally inadequate to compass the exceeding beauty and abundant activity of that person concerning whose words of love and grace, deeds of power, intensity of suffering and radiant glory, character and personality,—the unknown and unrecorded surpass and exceed all that the thought and insight of the “beloved disciple” have discovered and recalled. We do not now inquire into the reason of this, though such an inquiry would find itself partially answered in the vitality of the method, and the spiritual intensity, of Jesus Christ. The fact is one before which the student may well stand in astonishment not unmixed with awe.

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IT is with profound satisfaction that believers in Christianity find the controversies of the present day centering about these records of the person and work of its founder. Is the gospel account trustworthy? Did Jesus Christ do and say what is here recorded? These are fundamental, vital questions, and these are the living questions presented to the people on every hand. The literary problems of these writings may never be grasped or solved by any others than specialists. But the portrait of Jesus which these controverted Gospels disclose can be studied and enjoyed by peasant and philosopher alike. The portrait of that person, in all the beauty and strength of his character, is the authentication of the books in which it stands. No negative criticism can succeed in permanently overthrowing the historical character of the Gospels, because no negative criticism can essentially weaken the unique character of their representation of the Christ. Controversies along this line can have but one issue. If the Gospels are found wanting, the lack will be not in historical accuracy but in historical completeness. The monument that marks the overthrow of such assaults will bear the words already quoted,—*There are also many other things which Jesus did.*